

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

All THE YEAR ROUND

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A SERIAL STORY BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLACK SHERP."

CHAPTER V. WOOLGREAVES.

"You will be better when you have made the effort, mother," said Marian Ashurst to the widow, one day, when the beauty of the summer was at its height, and death and grief seemed very hard to bear, in the face of the unsympathising sunshine. "Don't think I underrate the effort, for indeed I don't, but you will be better when you have made it."

"Perhaps so, my dear," said Mrs. Ashurst, with reluctant submissiveness. "You are right; I am sure you always are right: but it is so little use to go to any place where one can't enjoy oneself, and where everybody must see that it is impossible; and you have—you know—" Her lip trembled, her voice broke. Her little hands, still soft and pretty, twined themselves together, with an expression of pain. Then she said no more.

Marian had been standing by the open window, looking out, the side of her head turned to her mother, who was glancing at her timidly. Now she crossed the room, with a quick steady step, and knelt down by Mrs. Ashurst's chair, clasping her hands upon the arm.

"Listen to me, dear," she said, with her clear eyes fixed on her mother's face, and her voice, though softened to a tone of the utmost tenderness, firm and decided. "You must never forget that I know exactly what and how much you feel, and that I share it all" (there was a forlornness in the girl's face which bore ample testimony to the truth of what she said) "when I tell you, in my practical way, what we must do. You remember, once, then, you spoke to me

about the Creswells, and I made light of them and their importance and influence. I would not admit it; I did not understand it. I had not fully thought about it then; but I admit it now. I understand it now, and it is my turn to tell you, my dearest mother, that we must be civil to them; we must take, or seem to take, their offers of kindness, of protection, of intimacy, as they are made. We cannot afford to do otherwise, and they are just the sort of people to be offended with us irreparably, if we did not allow them to extend their hospitality to us. It is rather officious, rather ostentatious; it has all the bitterness of making us remember more keenly what they might have done for us, but it is hospitality, and we need it; it is the promise of further services which we shall require urgently. You must rouse yourself, mother; this must be your share of helpfulness to me in the burthen of our life. And, after all, what does it matter? What real difference does it make? My father is as much present to you and to me in one place as in another. Nothing can alter, or modify, or soften; nothing can deepen or embitter that truth. Come with me—the effort will repay itself."

Mrs. Ashurst had begun to look more resolved, before her daughter, who had spoken with more than her usual earnestness and decision, had come to an end of her argument. She put her arm round the girl's neck, and gave her a timid squeeze, and then half rose, as though she were ready to go with her, anywhere she chose, that very minute. Then Marian, without asking another word on the subject, busied herself about her mother's dress, arranging the widow's heavy sombre drapery with a deft hand, and talking about the weather, the pleasantness of their projected walk, and the daily dole of Helmingham gossip.

Marian cared little for gossip of any kind herself, but it was a godsend to her sometimes, when she had particular reasons for not talking to her mother of the things that were in her mind, and did not find it easy to invent other things to talk to her about.

The object which Marian had in view just now, and which she had had some difficulty in attaining, was the inducing of her mother, who had passed the time since her bereavement in utter seclusion, to accept the invitation of Mr. Creswell, the owner of Woolgreaves, the local grandee par excellence, the person whose absence Marian had so lamented on the occasion of her father's illness, to pass "a long day" with him and his nieces. It was not the first time such an invitation had reached Mrs. Ashurst. Their rich neighbour, the dead schoolmaster's friend, had not been neglectful of the widow and her daughter, but it was the first time Marian had made up her mind that this advance on his part must be met and welcomed. She had as much reluctance to break through the seclusion of their life as her mother, though of a somewhat different stamp; but she had been pondering and calculating, while her mother had been only thinking and suffering, and she had decided that it must be done. She did not doubt that she should suffer more in the acting upon this decision than her mother; but it was made, and must be acted upon. So Marian took her mother to Woolgreaves. Mr. Creswell had offered to send a carriage (he rather liked the use of the indefinite article, which implied the extent of his establishment) to fetch the ladies, but Marian had declined this. The walk would do her mother good, and brace her nerves; she meant to talk to her easily, with seeming carelessness, of the possibilities of the future, on the way. At length Mrs. Ashurst was ready, and her daughter and she set forth, in the direction of the distressingly modern, but really imposing, mansion, which, for the first time, they approached, unsupported by him, in whose presence it had never occurred to them to suffer from any feeling of inferiority of position or means, or to believe that any one could regard them in a slighting manner.

Mr. Creswell, of Woolgreaves, had entertained a sincere regard, built on profound respect, for Mr. Ashurst. He knew the inferiority of his own mind, and his own education, to those of the man who had contentedly and laboriously filled so humble a position—one so unworthy of his

talents, as well as he knew the superiority of his own business abilities, the difference which had made him a rich man, and which would, under any circumstances, have kept Mr. Ashurst poor. He was a man possessed of much candour of mind and sound judgment; and though he preferred, quite sincerely, the practical ability which had made him what he was, and heartily enjoyed all the material advantages and pleasures of his life, he was capable of profound admiration for such unattainable things as taste, learning, and the indefinable moral and personal elements which combine to form a scholar and a gentleman. He was a commonplace man in every other respect than this, that he most sincerely despised and detested flattery, and was incapable of being deceived by it. He had not failed to understand that it would have been as impossible to James Ashurst to flatter as to rob him; and for this reason, as well as for the superiority he had so fully recognised, he had felt warm and abiding friendship for him, and lamented his death, as he had not mourned any accident of mortality since the day which had seen his pretty young wife laid in her early grave. Mr. Creswell, a poor man in those days, struggling manfully very far down on the ladder, which he had since climbed with the ease which not unfrequently attends effort, when something has happened to decrease the value of success, had loved his pretty, uneducated, merry little wife very much, and had felt for a while after she died, that he was not sure whether anything was worth working or striving for. But his constitutional activity of mind and body had got the better of that sort of feeling, and he had worked and striven to remarkably good purpose; but he had never asked another woman to share his fortunes. This was not altogether occasioned by lingering regret for his pretty Jenny. He was not of a sentimental turn of mind, and he might even have been brought to acknowledge, reluctantly, that his wife would probably have been much out of place in the fine house, and at the head of the luxurious establishment which his wealth had formed. She was humbly born, like himself, had not been ambitious, except of love and happiness, and had had no better education than enabled her to read and write, not so perfectly as to foster in her a taste for either occupation. If Mr. Creswell had a sorrowful remembrance of her sometimes, it died away with the reflection that she had been happy while she lived, and would not have been so happy

now. His continued bachelor estate was occasioned rather by his close and engrossing attention to the interests of his business, and, perhaps, also to the narrow social circle in which he lived. Pretty, uneducated, simple young country women will retain their power of pleasing men who have acquired education, and made money, and so elevated themselves far above their original station; but the influence of education and wealth upon the tastes of men of this sort is inimical to the chances of the young women of the classes in society among which they habitually find their associates. The women of the "well-to-do" world are unattractive to those men who have not been born in it. Such men either retain the predilections of their youth for women like those whose girlhood they remember, or cherish ambitious aspirations towards the inimitable, not to be borrowed or imported, refinement of the women of social spheres far above them. The former was Mr. Creswell's case, in as far as anything except business can be said to have been active in his affairs. The "ladies" in the Helmingham district were utterly uninteresting to him, and he had made that fact so evident long ago that they had accepted it; of course regarding him as an "oddity," and much to be pitied; and since his nieces had taken up their abode, on the death of their father, Mr. Creswell's only brother, at Woolgreaves, a matrimonial development in Mr. Creswell's career had been regarded as an impossibility. The owner of Woolgreaves was voted by general feminine consent "a dear old thing," and a very good neighbour, and the ladies only hoped he might not have trouble before him with "that pickle, young Tom," and were glad to think no poor woman had been induced to put herself in for such a life as that of Tom's stepmother would have been.

Mr. Creswell's only brother had belonged, not to the "well-to-do" community, but, on the contrary, to that of the "ne'er-do-wells," and he had died without a shilling, heavily in debt, and leaving two helpless girls—sufficiently delicately nurtured to feel their destitution with keenness amounting to despair, and sufficiently "fashionably," i.e. ill-educated, to be wholly incapable of helping themselves—to the mercy of the world. The contemplation of this contingency, for which he had plenty of leisure, for he died of a lingering illness, did not appear to have distressed Tom Creswell. He had believed in "luck" all

his life, with the touching devotion of a selfish man, who defines "luck" as the making of things comfortable for himself, and is not troubled with visions of, after him, the modern version of the deluge, which takes the squalid form of the pawn-broker's, and the poor-house; and "luck" had lasted his time. It had even survived him, so far as his children were concerned, for his brother, who had quarrelled with him, more from policy and of deliberate interest, regarding him as a hopeless spendthrift, the helping of whom was a useless extravagance, than from anger or disgust, came to the aid of the widow and her children, when he found that things were very much worse than he had supposed they would prove to be.

Mrs. Tom Creswell afforded a living example of her husband's "luck." She was a mild, gentle, very silly, very self-denying, estimable woman, who loved the "ne'er-do-well" so literally with all her heart, that when he died, she had not enough of that organ left to go on living with. She did not see why she should try, and she did not try, but quietly died in a few months, to the astonishment of rational people, who declared that Tom Creswell was a "good loss," and had never been of the least use either to himself or any other human being. What on earth was the woman about? Was she such an idiot as not to see his faults? Did she not know what a selfish, idle, extravagant, worthless fellow he was, and that he had left her to either pauperism or dependence on any one who would support her, quite complacently? If such a husband as *he* was—what she had seen in him beyond his handsome face, and his pleasant manner, *they* could not tell—was to be honoured in this way, gone quite daft about, in fact; they really could not perceive the advantage to men in being active, industrious, saving, prudent, and domestic. Nothing could be more true, more reasonable, more unanswerable, or more ineffectual. Mrs. Tom Creswell did not dispute it; she patiently endured much bullying by strong-minded, tract-dropping females of the spinster persuasion; she was quite satisfied to be told she had proved herself unworthy of a better husband. She did not murmur as it was proved to her, in the fiercest forms of accurate arithmetic, that her Tom had squandered sums which might have provided for her and her children decently, and had not even practised the poor self-denial of paying for an insurance on his

life. She contradicted no one, she rebuked no one, she asked forbearance and pity from no one, she merely wept, and said she was sure her brother-in-law would be kind to the girls, and that she would not like to be a trouble to Mr. Creswell herself, and was sure her Tom would not have liked her to be a trouble to Mr. Creswell. On this point the brother of the "departed saint," as the widow called the amiable idler of whose presence she considered the world unworthy, by no means agreed with her. Mr. Creswell was of opinion that so long as trouble kept clear of Tom, Tom would have been perfectly indifferent as to where it lighted. But he did not say so. He had not much respect for his sister-in-law's intellect, but he pitied her, and he was not only generous to her distress, but also merciful to her weakness. He offered her a home at Woolgreaves, and it was arranged that she should "try" to go there, after a while. But she never tried, and she never went, she "did not see the good of" anything, and in six months after Tom Creswell's death his daughters were settled at Woolgreaves, and it is doubtful whether the state of orphanhood was ever in any case a more tempered, modified misfortune than in theirs.

Thus, the family party at the handsome house, which Mrs. Ashurst and her daughter were about to visit, was composed of Mr. Creswell, his son Tom, a specimen of the schoolboy class, of whom this history has already afforded a glimpse, and the Misses Creswell, the Maud and Gertrude of whom Marian had, in her grief, spoken in terms of sharp and contemptuous disparagement, which, though not entirely censurable, judged from her point of view, were certainly not altogether deserved.

Mr. Creswell earnestly desired to befriend the visitor and her daughter. Gertrude Creswell thought it would be very "nice" to be "great friends" with that clever Miss Ashurst, and had, with all the impulsiveness of generous girlhood, exulted in the idea of being, in her turn, able to extend kindness to people in need of it, even as she and her sister had been. But Maud, who though her actual experience of life had been identical with her sister's, had more natural intuition and caution, checked the enthusiasm with which Gertrude drew this picture :

"We must be very careful, Gerty dear," she said. "I fancy this clever Miss Ashurst is very proud. People say you never find out the nature of any one until trouble

brings it to the light. It would never do to let her think one had any notion of doing her services, you know, she might not like it from us; uncle's kindness to them is a different thing; but we must remember that we are, in reality, no better off than she is."

Gertrude reddened. She had not spoken with the remotest idea of patronage of Miss Ashurst in her mind, and her sister's warning pained her. Gertrude had a dash of her father's insouciance in her, though in him it had been selfish joviality, and in her it was only happy thoughtlessness. It had occurred to Gertrude, more than once before to-day, to think she should like to be married to some one whom she could love very much indeed, and away from this fine place which did not belong to them, though her uncle was very kind, in a home of her own. Maud had a habit of saying and looking things which made Gertrude entertain such notions, and now she had, with the best intentions, injured her pleasure in the anticipation of the visit of Mrs. Ashurst and Marian.

It was probably this little incident which lent the slight touch of coldness and restraint to the manner of Gertrude Creswell which Marian instantly felt, and which she erroneously interpreted. When they had met formerly, there had been none of this hesitating formality.

"These girls don't want us here," said Marian to herself; "they grudge us their uncle's friendship, lest it should take a form which would deprive them of any of his money."

Perhaps Marian was not aware of the resolve lurking in her heart even then, that such was precisely the form which that friendship should be made to take. The evil warp in her otherwise frank and noble mind told in this. Gertrude Creswell, to whom in particular she imputed mercenary feeling, and the forethought of a calculating jealousy, was entirely incapable of anything of the kind, and was actuated wholly by her dread that Marian should misinterpret any premature advance towards intimacy on her part as an impertinence. Thus the foundation of a misunderstanding between the two was laid.

Marian's thoughts had been busy with the history of the sisters, as she and her mother approached Woolgreaves. She had heard her father describe Tom Creswell and his wife, and dwell upon the fortunate destiny which had transferred Maud and Gertrude to their uncle's care. She thought

of all that now with bitterness. The contrast between her father's character, life, and fate, and the character, life, and fate of Tom Creswell, was a problem difficult to solve, hard to endure. Why had the measure been so differently—she would, she *must* say, so unjustly—meted to these two men? Her fancy dwelt on every point in that terrible difference, lingered around the two death-beds, pictured the happy, sheltered, luxurious, unearned security of those whom the spendthrift had left uncared for, and the harsh, gloomy future before her mother and herself, in which only two things, hard work and scanty means, were certain, which had been the vision her father must have seen of the fate of those he loved, when he, so fitted to adorn an honoured and conspicuous position, had died, worn out in the long vain strife with poverty. Here were the children of the man who had lived utterly for self, and the widow and child of the "righteous," who had done his duty manfully from first to last. Hard and bitter were Marian's reflections on this contrast, and earnestly did she wish that some speedy means of accelerating by efforts of her own the fulfilment of those promises of Providence, in which she felt sometimes tempted to put little faith, might arise.

"I suppose he was not exactly forsaken," said the girl, in her mind, as she approached the grand gates of Woolgreaves, whose iron-mongery displayed itself in the utmost profusion, allied with artistic designs more sumptuous than elegant, "and that no one will see us 'begging our bread'; but there is only meagre consolation to me in this, since he had not what might—or all their service is a pretence, all their 'opinions' are lies—have saved him, and I see little to rejoice in, in being just above the begging of bread."

"They have done a great deal to the place since we were here, Marian," said Mrs. Ashurst, looking round admiringly upon the skilful gardening, and rich display of shrubs, and flowers, and outdoor decorations of all kinds. "It must take a great many hands to keep this in order. Not so much as a leaf or a pebble out of its place."

"They say there are four gardeners always employed," said Marian. "I wish we had the money it costs; we needn't wish Midsummer-day further off then. But here is Mr. Creswell, coming to meet us."

Marian Ashurst was much more attractive in her early womanhood than she had promised to be as a very young girl, and

the style of her face and figure was of the kind which is assisted in its effect by a somewhat severe order of costume. She was not beautiful, not even positively handsome, and it is possible she might have looked commonplace in the ordinary dress of young women of limited means, where cheap material and coarse colouring must necessarily be used. In her plain attire of deep mourning, with no ornament save one or two trinkets of jet, which had been her mother's, Marian Ashurst looked far from commonplace, and remarkably ladylike. The strongly defined character in her face, the composure of her manner, the quietness of her movements, were not the charms which are usually associated with youth, but they were charms, and her host was a person to whom they were calculated to prove especially charming. Except in his generally benevolent way of entertaining a kindly regard for his friend's daughter, Mr. Creswell had never noted nor taken any particular notice of Marian Ashurst; but she had not been an hour in his house before she impressed herself upon him as being very different from all the other girls of his acquaintance, and much more interesting than his nieces.

Mr. Creswell felt rather annoyed with his nieces. They were civil, certainly; but they did not seem to understand the art of making the young lady, who was visiting them, happy and "at home." There was none of the freemasonry of "the young person" about them. After a while, Mr. Creswell found that the order of things he had been prepared for—what he certainly would have taken to be the natural order of things—was altered, set aside, he did not know how, and that he was walking along the trim garden paths, after luncheon, with Miss Ashurst, while Maud and Gertrude took charge of the visitor to whom he had meant to devote himself, and were making themselves as amiable and pleasant to her as they had failed to make themselves to Marian. Perhaps the fault or the reason was as much on Miss Ashurst's side as on theirs. Before he had conducted his visitor over all the "show" portions of the grounds and gardens, Mr. Creswell had arrived at the conclusion that Marian was a remarkable young woman, with strong powers of observation, and a decided aptitude for solid and sensible conversation, which probably explained the coldness towards her of Maud and Gertrude, who were not remarkable, except for fine complexions, and hair to correspond, and whose talk was of the most

vapid description, so far as he had had the opportunity of observing.

There was not much of importance in appearance to relate about the occurrences of a day which was destined to be remembered as very important by all who passed its hours at Woolgreaves. It had the usual features of a "long day;" spasmodic attacks of animation and lapses of weariness, a great deal of good eating and drinking, much looking at pictures and parade books, some real gratification, and not a little imperfectly disguised fatigue. It differed in one respect, however, from the usual history of a "long day." There was one person who was not glad when it came to an end. That person was Mr. Creswell.

Poor Mrs. Ashurst had found her visit to Woolgreaves much more endurable than she expected. She had indeed found it almost pleasurable. She had been amused—the time had passed, the young ladies had been kind to her. She praised them to Marian.

"They are nice creatures," she said; "really tender-hearted and sincere. Of course they are not clever like you, my dear; but then all girls cannot be expected to be *that*."

"They are very fortunate," said Marian, moodily. "Just think of the safe and happy life they lead. Living like that *is* living. We only exist. They have no want for the present; no anxiety for the future. Everything they see and touch, all the food they eat, everything they wear, means money."

"Yes," said Mrs. Ashurst; "and after all, money is a great thing. Not, indeed," she added, with tears in her eyes, "that I could care much for it now, for it could not, if we had it, restore what we have lost."

"No," said Marian, frowning, "but it could have saved us from losing it; it could have preserved love and care, home, position, and happiness to us. True, mother, money is a great thing."

But Marian's mother was not listening to her. Her mind had returned to its familiar train of thought again.

Something had been said that day about Mrs. Ashurst's paying Woolgreaves a longer visit, going for a week or two, of course, accompanied by Marian. Mrs. Ashurst had not decidedly accepted or negatived the proposition. She felt rather nervous about it herself, and uncertain as to Marian's sentiments, and her daughter had not aided her by word or look. Nor did Marian recur

to the subject when they found themselves at home again in the evening. But she remembered it, and discussed it with herself in the night. Would it be well that her mother should be habituated to the comforts, the luxuries of such a house, so unattainable to her at home, so desirable in her state of broken health and spirits? This was the great difficulty which beset Marian; and she felt she could not decide it then.

Her long waking reverie of that night did not concern itself with the people she had been with. It was fully occupied with the place. Her mind mounted from floor to floor of the handsome house, which represented so much money, reviewing and appraising the furniture, speculating on the separate and collective value of the plate, the mirrors, the hangings, the decorations. Thousands and thousands of pounds, she thought, hundreds and hundreds of times more money than she had ever seen, and nothing to do for it all. Those girls who lived among it, what had they done that they should have all of it? Why had she, whose mother needed it so much, who could so well appreciate it, none of it? Marian's last thought before she fell asleep that night was, not only that money was a great thing, but that almost anything would be worth doing to get money.

DOMESTIC TURKS.

My friend, Nourri Effendi, had passed a considerable portion of his life in the department of Foreign Affairs, and had spent some time in the European embassies. His chief western acquirements were French and a little German, but he was a distinguished oriental scholar. As a master of the epistolary style in Turkish—or rather in Turkish strongly dashed with Persian after the ancient fashion—few could get near him, for he mounted to the seventy-seventh heaven of inspiration. The Effendi, being by no means a man of the world, continually got into contentions with his colleagues. Thus he was often thrown out of employment, and it was difficult for his numerous old friends and admirers to find him anything suitable to his genius; for he did not shine so much in the quantity of his work, as in his own estimate of the quality. The quantity was small.

I remember his favouring me by writing a translation of five lines which were to be addressed in triplicate to the Grand Vizier, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of Commerce. The Effendi, as was his wont, came later than his appointment, with a time-honoured excuse, that as Zuleikha Hanum wanted him to buy something, her errand had engaged him.

He set himself sedulously and seriously to

work. I asked him now and then how he was getting on, but he had been three hours at it before he called my attention to the accomplishment of one portion of his task. He then read me the draft of three lines of his high-flown Turkish, and solicited me to admire the beautiful antithesis, and to acknowledge how well the two parts of the phrase were balanced. "It is almost poetry," said he.

"Mashalla, Effendi," said I, "it is an admirable composition; but it states the very opposite of my meaning; and, like poetry, it is not true."

"It would be a pity, Bey," replied he, "to sacrifice such a gem. Observe!" He went on, &c. &c.

He was confident it would excite the attention and admiration of the Grand Vizier. With great difficulty I did at last get my own meaning substituted, deeply to his regret.

He then copied out in due form the letter for his highness ready for the post, and I affixed my signet.

"Now," said I, "Effendi, quick with the two copies for the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Commerce."

"I will at once," responded he, "set about composing a suitable epistle for his Highness the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"Wherefore, Effendi, when there is nothing more to be done than to copy that to the Grand Vizier, as it is the communication of the facts?"

"True," answered he; "but therefore it will never do. This letter is composed for the dignity of the Grand Vizier. As Aali Pasha is one of the most distinguished scholars in Turkey, I cannot think of writing to him what is only suited for the Grand Vizier. While respecting the exalted rank of Aali Pasha, we must lower it in style, to adapt it to one who is no longer grand vizier."

"And the Minister of Commerce," said I; "what as to his copy?"

"Inshallah!" said the Effendi, soberly, "we will provide for him, too. We must compose him another letter, with other words, in proportion to his quality; for he is much lower in rank than Aali Pasha or a grand vizier. Fear not!"

The Effendi applied himself to the blithesome occupation of compiling such an epistle as should gratify the critical eye of the universally admired master of learning, and the mail steamer had worked some two hours down the harbour with his letter for the Grand Vizier and my poor and hasty substitutes for the jewelled literary treasures of Nourri Effendi, before he had finished Number Two.

"Mashallah, Bey," said he, "the steamer has gone. What a pity! For this is indeed a satisfactory letter."

He went off, having another commission to execute for his wife on his way home; and I never asked him for Number Three.

He was indeed an accomplished master of his graphic art, and would sit, green spectacles on nose, and smoke, and write, and blot out, and get another whiff from his chibook,

and another word from the coinage of his brain, and so his task proceeded. A distinguished provincial authority, who had been a chamberlain of the Sultan, courtly, courteous, and accomplished, had received me with some hospitality; and on his being promoted to a higher post I was desirous of congratulating him. Nourri Effendi gladly came to my aid. Three days did he devote to the composition of a short letter. Though he expounded to me its meanings and its beauties, for there were many for each word, it would, in my inferior state of appreciation, have taken me at least three days more, to arrive at anything near its exact interpretation. I fear that I affixed my mehur or signet to a document which I very imperfectly understood.

After many days the slow post brought me a reply from His Excellency. Having glanced at it, I transferred it to Nourri Effendi for his perusal. He was in ecstasies, and he read, re-read, and remarked upon each passage, making (I dare say) a most valuable commentary on the recondite mysteries of the oriental language. The Governor was well known to be as great a master of the sublime as Nourri Effendi, and had responded valiantly.

At the Effendi's request I delivered the precious work of art to him, and at the end of a month he was still exhibiting to admiring and bored friends his draft, with the Governor's admirable response.

Nourri Effendi's domestic claims so much interfered with his public engagements, that his occasional apologies on this head brought on many little conversations about family matters. His wife, although of provincial extraction, had profited by a long residence in Stambool, to acquire the tasteful habits of a metropolitan. There was no need to inquire how many wives the Effendi had, for there could be but one autocrat to whose sway he was bound. In vain had the legislator of Islam conferred on him, as a true believer, the prerogative of summary divorce by his own whim or behest, and of making this irrevocable by the formula of triple divorce. The Effendi must have been long ago convinced that such divorces were not invented for deliverance from such a wife as his, and that divorce would only have been followed by re-marriage to her, under conditions of severer thraldom. I imagine he had, as the limit of his liberty, a right of grumbling outside his own house, and beyond reach of the lady's ears. The narrow income of the Effendi was spent under my lady's dictation, and extraordinary budgets were demanded, although they were obliged to live a life of much enforced economy, greatly to her discontent. His provision of tobacco and snuff could only have been obtained by making a forced levy on the receipt of his monthly salary; after which epoch his purse departed from him.

From this authority I got an insight into the subject of mothers-in-law in Turkey, and I grieve to say he was not so devotedly attached to his mother-in-law as perhaps he ought to have been. Unluckily he had moved near to

his wife's birthplace, and this not only brought him a visit from mamma when he could ill afford it, but his wife exercised her privilege under the marriage laws of Turkey, by making a return journey. Mothers-in-law need not legally be brought into the house, in Turkey, but whether they can practically be kept out by an ordinary husband it is hard to say. Nourri Effendi's relative had kindly gone as far as Stambool to visit him and his wife. As for the visits of wives to their mothers, that is a totally different matter. A refusal to allow such expression of affection might be attended by a summons to the nearest police magistrate, and a warrant to levy on the goods of the culprit such sum for travelling charges, outfit, dresses, presents, &c., as the lady might demand, and competent assessors—possibly female—declare to be consistent with the wife's pretensions in society.

From Nourri Effendi I learned the opinions of Turkish wives on the important subject of followers. "Madame," said he, "has kept me at home again, asking me to buy her a pair of black slaves, which she says we absolutely require for our respectability; but that I do not see." I had long known that in Turkey everything must be perfect, and therefore in pairs. As a boy I had seen the braces of pistols and the pairs of knives and watches, and this prepared me for seeing the male and female population paired off, to avoid the imperfection of the odd state and the consequent perils of the evil eye. A pair of slaves was a new idea. The pair of slaves did not mean two boys or two girls, but a pair, a boy and a girl.

"I have told her several times we do not want them, and cannot afford them; but she persists, as women will, and says 'they will be a great economy besides.' I do not like blacks in the house, because they are only fresh-caught barbarians, and, besides, we cannot want two. 'Why not,' said I, 'get some decent orphan girl from the country, whom we can take care of;' but madame answers she does not want girls, as in a short time they are sure to have brothers and cousins, who will see them; but a black from Africa has no cousins."

From the lady with servants, the transition to the lady without them is not great.

Osman Aga, the son of a good family in a large provincial city, was, when I knew him, a retired captain of cavalry on half-pay or pension, married to a lady whose patrimony was some small bit of property near the former city of Assos. Osman had profited little at school; he could not write, and he did not like reading—that art, indeed, he now left to his wife. In those good old times he could be a captain without them. As every one, instead of signing his name, affixes his signet, Osman was sufficiently qualified when he contented himself with the figures which would fill up a return of his troop, or make out the quantities in an account for barley or chopped straw—in case no learned private was at hand to officiate as clerk.

Besides his long period of service in every

part of the empire, Osman Aga had been in the brilliant Bulgarian campaign against the Russians, and wore the medal. He was never tired of extolling the gallantry and conduct of the handful of English heroes who had served with the Ottoman army; though a thorough patriot, he often wished that the Turkish soldiery were led by such officers.

The captain had served so long as to earn his pension; a sum of twelve pounds a year, paid monthly—when not in arrear. On this sum, there are still parts of Turkey in which he could have kept his wife and daughter; but he could not do that in a western city, to which progress had brought European prices. He inherited a small house in a respectable quarter, but had no other patrimony. His sole remaining resources were the scanty olive and grape crops on the fields of Adileh Hanum, which furnished little coin for remittance.

Osman was anxious to eke out his narrow income by some small employment, and had lately lost a petty berth on the extraordinary staff at the customs, to which he was waiting to be restored. A Turkish friend of rank spoke very strongly to me of Osman Aga as a man of character and integrity, and begged me to use my influence to get him temporary occupation. Osman Aga became, therefore, an occasional caller at my house. He was a thin man, of middle height and of soldierly bearing, about fifty-five. His uniform frock-coat was carefully kept and brushed. Its smartness was of the past, and the medals were its only ornament. He was always neat, though in Turkey a button or two off, or any such divergence from symmetry, is no more thought of than in Munster.

In his walks to my house, he by-and-by brought a shy little baby girl, with large black eyes. Sometimes she was in full dress, going out on a holiday; her finger-nails and palms duly stained with henna, a pretty embroidered handkerchief on her head, with a jewel, a gold coin, or a flower adorning it; sometimes she was in her ordinary muslin walking dress; never gaudy. An elder boy had died of fever, and she was the only child. Little Fatmeh was soon familiar in my family. Her gentle well-behaved ways won regard for her, though she could seldom be prevailed on to accept anything. When she did so, the fruit, or whatever it might be, was always first shown to her father, and then taken home to her mother.

At last, I got a temporary berth for Osman Aga as kerserdar, or police inspector, at an unhealthy place in the country: to the great delight of himself and his family, and also of mine. The small income would at once place them at ease. Adileh Hanum called on my wife, with Fatmeh, to express her gratitude. She was a quiet ladylike woman of five-and-thirty; well and neatly, but not richly, dressed, with the Constantinople yashmak, and not the provincial veil.

This lady told my family of the strain the captain's loss of office had brought on their small income, and the benefit my intervention had conferred on them. They were thankful to

God, and her husband would ever be found faithful to me.

While the captain was officiating in the country, and looking after evildoers, I sometimes saw him. He told me that his quarters were bad, but that he had at length found a small house in the village, and was going to have his family down. I thought they would hardly like the change from a city life to the dulness of a village. "The familia," said he, "had been used to it in her father's house, and was fond of goats, and turkeys, and geese, and fowls, and a garden. It would be quite a treat for Fatmeh, who could play about all day long." Familia, or family, is now a common polite word in Turkish for wife.

The captain's occupation ran out; he became a suitor to me again; the treasury, to remit to the foreign creditor, and keep faith with him, held back payments from Osman and other pensioners and home servants; and he was as ill off as ever. Every now and then I got him some little employment, and received his thanks. There was never a Bairam, or Christmas, or Easter, for some years when the complimentary calls in our house did not include Captain Osman Aga, with his wife and daughter. I had become his effective patron and friend, and his devotion went beyond European bounds, though the position of a captain in the army in Turkey is not even yet what it is in Europe. The captain, yuzbashi, or head of a hundred in the regular army, was, till the change was made in my time, no more than a warrant officer; commissions beginning with second majors, and only the sons of country gentlemen or squires serving as captains and lieutenants. The present Sultan, to elevate the army, has given official precedence to the captains; but they hardly realise their new honours at the tail of the aristocracy. Europeans seldom understand the real status of the captain, and draw very disparaging reflections from incidents which come before them. The captain is often no more than an illiterate common man raised from the ranks—I must add, though, generally a conscientious soldier and thorough master of his drill and business.

A curious story is told of a French ambassador, as an illustration of the want of dignity in what he considered to be Turkish officers. The old general, being present at the grand audience, in the Seraglio at the Bairam, received some attentions from a captain commanding near him. On leaving, his excellency desired his dragoman to tender his thanks to the captain, and invite him, as a brother-officer, to dinner. The captain expressed his gratitude, but continued to hang about, as if wanting something more. "I can settle it," said the dragoman; and he evidently did so, as the captain retired with much expression of contentment. "How did you manage it?" "I gave him a five-franc piece, with which he was much better satisfied than with the honour of dining with your excellency." The ambassador naturally wondered at the low standard of Turkish officers, and it

was no business of the Levantine dragoman to undeceive him, and inform him that the captain was not an officer, but a sergeant-major.

As to Osman Aga, both before and after his elevation to the table of precedence as a functionary of state of the fourth class, his devotion to me was the same. It never occurred to him, or to me, that it was a degradation, and it was what he would willingly have shown to his general, or to any dear friend. If we were on a journey, no one but himself was allowed to saddle my horse, if he could help it. He would snatch my boots out of the hands of my men, and polish them himself. There was no act of personal help he would not tender, and this without any sycophantism or loss of respect on either side. The colonel will fill the chibook of his old general—he is as his child. The major will do as much for the colonel, the captain for the major under whom he has served, and so on. Two friends of equal rank will vie which shall seem to kiss the hem of the other's robe; and ladies act in the same way. However undignified this may seem to Europeans, not being Spaniards, it conveys to the Osmanli an idea of dignity; not of humiliation. Under the old constitution (and the impress of it is not yet lost), all was so far democratic that any porter in the street might aspire to the highest honours, and believe himself destined to become grand vizier. Those who attain honours are therefore looked upon as delegates and representatives of the mass, to whom free-men cheerfully do homage.

In the course of years, Fatmeh grew bigger, and not so shy, and I found she had been sent to school; on which the captain expressed his sentiments with as much unction as if he had never played the dunce. "The Family," said he, "considers schooling religious and necessary. The Family can read, and Fatmeh, Inshallah, will get on with her learning, as is her duty!"

"Inshallah, please God!" responded I.

By-and-by Fatmeh made progress in her reading, and the reverend schoolmaster, the captain told me, was much satisfied with her. She gave me a specimen of her skill out of one of my books, reading some hard words with all the precision and ceremony of a Hojah; nor did she neglect her needle. Besides work of her mother's, she brought me a handkerchief she had embroidered, and my family looked on her as a bright girl.

Occasionally on festivals we got presents from Adile Hanum of choice confectionery or pastry, and we found the small household conducted with as much comfort and care as Turkish arrangements will allow.

The poor captain was much pinched after I left; but I am informed that Fatmeh is married to a rising merchant, and that there were great festivities, to which we should all have been invited, had we been on the spot. Adile Hanum spends some of her time in arranging her daughter's household, and the captain passes his spare time in the warehouse of his son-in-law, where, though his expertness is

limited, he is ornamental as a companion to old customers and a guarantee of respectability to new acquaintances.

PARAFFINE.

WHENCE the paraffine about which we read so much in the newspapers? How was it discovered, where is it obtained, what are its properties, by what means is it manufactured? Daily we read of its marvellous capabilities, its destructive powers, and the numerous and strange uses to which it can be applied. Occasionally we are startled with reports of terrible disasters which it has occasioned: railway trains burnt to ashes, as at Abergelie recently; houses blown into ruins and the inhabitants maimed and killed; heads of quiet households startled into hysterics by the unexpected explosion of the evening lamps; ships lost at sea by incautious stowage of the barrels containing the liquid. Painfully familiar is the reading public with the name of paraffine; but to most persons it is a name and nothing more.

And yet its history has in it something of romance. The discovery of the mineral from which it is extracted was an accident. Its manufacture was for a long time a secret. The profits which arose from its production gave rise to a law-suit, as famous and interminable as those of Plainestane v. Peebles, or Jarndyce v. Jarndyce. Its production suddenly raised a poor, almost unknown, district, into a thriving and populous seat of industry. Added to all this, the processes to which it is subjected are among the most curious and interesting in modern chemistry.

The word paraffine is almost new to the language, its introduction dating back only so far as the year 1847. About that time, Professor Lyon Playfair, who was travelling in Derbyshire, had his attention drawn to a thick, dark, oily fluid trickling from some rents in a coal mine. The peculiarity of the liquid arrested his thoughts; and after due calculation and experiment, he arrived at the conclusion that this substance, which was, through ignorance, allowed to run to waste, contained properties of a very remarkable and valuable character. Being himself occupied with other investigations, he communicated the result of his observations to Mr. James Young, an acquaintance of an analytical turn of mind, and encouraged him to conduct experiments with the view of testing the qualities of the crude and mysterious liquor. Acting upon the hints thus given, and sustained by strong hopes of a successful issue, that gentleman took the matter in hand, bringing to the prosecution of the work great experience, perseverance, and no inconsiderable degree of knowledge as a practical chemist. The result far exceeded his expectations. Subjected to distillation, the coarse fluid yielded a pale yellow-coloured oil, full of floating lustrous particles. Further experiments proved these to be crystals of paraffine—a substance then only known to the learned. This discovery led to

the establishment in Derbyshire of a small manufactory, for distilling burning and lubricating oils from the coarse petroleum issuing from the coal-mine. The venture proved exceedingly remunerative; and for two years a pretty extensive trade in the new oils was maintained.

Suddenly the supply of the raw material ceased: the trickling stream of coarse petroleum was dried up; and the manufactory was stopped. The untoward event caused much chagrin to the proprietor, who was beginning to look forward with assurance to the foundation of a highly profitable source of commerce. He found himself at once cut off from employment, and the experiments which had cost him so much toil and anxiety threatening to become valueless. Indomitable will saved him from despair. He felt persuaded that a substitute could be found for the petroleum, and to the discovery of this his energies were directed. Reflection and observation had, some time before, caused him to arrive at the conclusion that the crude petroleum was produced by simple natural causes; and further study of the subject convinced him that those causes were merely the gradual distillation of coal by means of subterranean heat. This was a great step in advance. Prospects of success again dawned upon him, and he looked forward to the early resumption of his manufactory. One desideratum only remained, and that was to be able to produce an artificial petroleum equal to the natural rock-oil, the supply of which he had exhausted. This difficulty also yielded to perseverance; and after two years' investigations in the laboratory, he found that a liquid of an oleaginous kind, similar in its properties to the natural oil, was obtained by subjecting coal to distillation at a low temperature.

These preliminary obstacles vanquished, the next point to be considered was, where to procure the requisite mineral? Petroleum, it was found, could be extracted from any coal of a bituminous nature; but the species known as cannel coal yielded the largest quantities. Even this, however, was not sufficiently rich in oil-producing qualities to induce Mr. Young to revive the manufacture. He feared that the expense would be too great, and that the quantity of petroleum produced would be in very small proportion to the amount of coal consumed. Various coal-fields were surveyed, and numerous investigations were conducted, with the view of deciding whether a mineral could not be procured which would yield a fair supply of oil; but for a long time the result was despaired of. Almost every coal was suitable, but none was sufficiently prolific. Clearly, little prospect of establishing another manufactory! Just as weariness of the heart, arising from hope deferred, was setting in, a discovery was made in Linlithgowshire which gave a new turn to events, and promised to realise the most sanguine wishes of the investigator. This was in the year 1850. Borings, which had been carried on near Bathgate for some time, made known the fact that a peculiar kind of coal

which there abounded was exceedingly rich in oil. Mr. Young becoming apprised of the fact, lost no time in acquiring a lease of the coal-field; and in the year following he opened the Bathgate Paraffine Works, which, in the course of a few years, converted a small weaving village, with a population of three thousand souls, into an industrious hive of upwards of ten thousand.

For the sake of convenience we have described the substance from which the future paraffine was to be made as Linlithgowshire "coal;" but this designation has been denied it by learned and competent authorities. To the unpractised eye, however, it is purely a species of coal, and may be regarded essentially as such. It is a hard, lustreless, rusty, black-coloured mineral, very brittle, and apt to break into thin slabs like slates. Perhaps there are few more notable instances of the truth, that you can get men to swear that black is white, and white black, than in connexion with the "coal" to which we are referring. As has been said, it was the subject of a celebrated law-suit. The proprietor to whom the coal-field belonged, becoming aware in due course that an invaluable article called paraffine was being distilled from it, which was rapidly pouring a fortune into the treasury of the distiller, demanded a very large increase of rental. This was refused, and the dispute went to court. The case dragged its slow length for years. Geologists, naturalists, mineralogists, chemists, colliers; witnesses, learned and unlearned, were ranged on either side and pitted against each other. The proprietor of the estate and his friends declared that the substance out of which paraffine was being manufactured was not "coal," as defined in the lease, but a mineral of a distinct species, and that therefore he had the right to increase the rental (seeing the mineral had turned out so valuable), or to get the lease cancelled. Mr. Young and his witnesses, on the other hand, averred that the substance was coal, and none other than coal; and that if he had discovered valuable properties in it he should reap the benefit. The dispute, as is generally the case, was ultimately found to have benefited no one but the lawyers.

Leaving history, let us pass to the process of manufacture. Here the most wonderful part of the tale has to be related. Few persons who are accustomed to use the pure white candles, delicate as wax in their hue, and known popularly by the name of "composites;" and the clear oil, almost as transparent as water, which is called "paraffine;" have any idea that both are produced from a dull, compact coal, totally devoid of the lustre which gives to that mineral the appellation of the "black diamond." And yet this seeming miracle is achieved by the aid of chemistry—that strange science which changes and transmutes substances, and reveals properties hidden and mysterious at the will or instigation of the student. The process by which the change is effected is complicated and laborious; but, freed from its technicalities, it may be easily explained.

The coal yields four different articles, all of

which are largely employed in daily life, and have given rise to a considerable commerce. There is, first, the paraffine oil for burning, at present manufactured by thousands of gallons, which, in many parts of England, where gas is still unknown, is the staple commodity of illumination. Then a second quality of the same oil, considerably cruder and coarser, which, on account of its cheapness and general aptitude, is largely employed for lubricating machinery. Naphtha comes next upon the list—a light, volatile fluid; much used by travelling showmen to light up their stalls and tents. Lastly, there is solid paraffine—a pure, white, shining, tasteless substance, scarcely distinguishable from wax, which is manufactured into candles. These substances, though widely differing in colour, properties, and consistency, are all manufactured by nearly the same process, the difference consisting merely in the number of times that a particular operation is repeated.

Boghead mineral is the name of the coal employed in the manufacture of paraffine; and this is conveyed from the pits direct into the heart of the works, by means of branch lines of railway. Arrived here, the coal is passed through a huge iron crushing-machine, and broken into small pieces, to facilitate the labour of subsequent stages. The first result to be achieved is to extract the crude oil from the coal. This is effected by means of retorts, into which the mineral is put, and the oleaginous matter extracted by burning. These retorts may, for our purposes, be described as huge upright iron pipes passing through furnaces. The coal is filled into the pipe or tube by the top, which is then closed with an air-tight valve; and the bottom of the pipe is led into a pool of water to prevent the entrance of air from below. A low red heat of uniform temperature is maintained constantly in the retorts. As the coal is acted upon by the fire, it descends gradually in the tube and becomes entirely decomposed. The essential or oleaginous property of the mineral passes off in vapour, and the refuse falls through the bottom of the pipe into the pool of water, and is raked away. The vapour or steam, as it is generated by the decomposition of the coal, is carried off by a pipe in the side of the retort. This pipe again communicates with a series of pipes placed upright in the open air, and arranged on the same principle as the bars of a common gridiron, after the fashion that prevails in gasworks. The vapour, in travelling through this labyrinth of pipes, cools, is condensed into liquid, and is run off into an immense reservoir sunk into the ground. The crude, oily liquor thus collected is a thick, black, greasy fluid, not unlike tar, which moves with a sluggish motion when stirred, and gives off inflammable vapours at the usual atmospheric temperature. This coarse oil, both in its properties and appearance, closely resembles natural petroleum, and is equal to the rock oil, which, as we have seen, was obtained in Derbyshire.

The raw material thus procured by simple burning is kept stored in the tank, and is only drawn off when required. To the observer

nothing seems stranger than that this heavy, black, tarry liquid should produce oil as pure as water, and solid paraffine as white as marble. And yet the marvel is wrought daily, and on a scale which supplies distant markets of the world with oil. It is a mere question of refining. The black liquor is, as it were, boiled, washed, and bleached, re-boiled, re-washed, and re-bleached, until the last particle of its darkness and impurity is purged away. The first step in the work of refinement is in some respects similar to the previous process of decomposition. The crude tarry liquid is put into stills, which we may call huge boilers of gigantic strength, with movable doors or lids. When the stills have been filled, the doors are closed, and the joints are stuffed with clay, so as to render the interior perfectly air-tight. Fires are then lighted in the furnaces below the boilers, and kept up to a steady heat, till the fluid inside distils over and is transmuted again into vapour. This vapour, as in the former instance, permeates through another series of condensing pipes, and, during its transit, is re-transmuted into liquor, and flows into a second reservoir. Collected in this tank, the oil shows abundant evidence of the severity of the ordeal through which it has been put. It passed into the stills black, and of the consistency of treacle; it has come out of a dark green colour, and of the consistency of pea-soup. A large portion of the coal-black has, in fact, been boiled out of it, which is now to be found in the bottom of the boilers in the shape of a lustrous compact residue resembling coke, for which it makes a very good substitute.

The next stage in the process of purification is of a different character. The dark green liquor is transferred to tanks, and a certain quantity of strong sulphuric acid is added. The acid is employed in order still further to bleach the oil, and purge it of some more of the impurity with which it is so largely impregnated. To effect this object it is essential that the oil and the acid should be mixed up or assimilated as much as possible—a work of some difficulty, on account of the tendency of the former to float on the top, by reason of its lighter specific gravity. This tendency is neutralised by the action of a revolving stirrer fitted with blades, which, when put in motion, beats and agitates the two liquids, and causes them to mingle equally. For four hours is this operation continued, until, under the biting influence of the acid, the dark green oil changes to pale green, and gives token of having parted with much of the grosser substances that had rendered it dull and opaque. The stirrers being at length stopped, the liquor is allowed to settle, and the organic impurities that have been separated from it by the action of the vitriol, collect in the bottoms of the tanks. The lees in this case assume the shape of a coarse acid tar, which is also used as a substitute for fuel.

The oil, thus far cleansed of its foulness, is now transferred to clean tanks, mixed with a strong solution of caustic soda, and again subjected to the beating of the stirrers. The action of the alkali extracts a good deal more of the

colouring matter, and changes the pale green to yellow. At the end of a second period of four hours the liquor is allowed to settle, is drawn off from the lees as before, is pumped into the stills and re-distilled, and is again brought back to be put through the acid and alkali bleaching process; the result being its assumption of a clear, pale, yellow colour. When in this stage of its preparation the oil contains the elements of no less than four different products, each valuable as articles of commerce, to separate which is the next care of the manufacturer.

The separation is effected merely by distilling the oil at various temperatures. At the lowest temperature the lightest and most volatile parts of the oil pass off in the shape of vapour. Upon being cooled, by passing through pipes, this vapour yields a liquid which, upon being distilled by itself, gives a light, transparent, inflammable fluid known by the name of naphtha, the specific gravity of which is considerably less than that of the naphtha derived from coal-tar. This naphtha is largely employed as a substitute for turpentine in india-rubber works, where it is employed to dissolve the materials used in that branch of manufacture. At the temperature next to the lowest, those parts of the oil that are next to naphtha in point of volatility are taken off, distilled and condensed, and yield paraffine or lamp oil. The processes of purification and distillation are repeated with this oil till it has assumed the requisite degree of purity, and becomes transparent and almost free from smell. A gallon of this oil weighs about eight and a quarter pounds, and is, in point of illuminating power, nearly equal to one gallon and a quarter of American petroleum. A yet higher temperature than that which is necessary for the production of the burning oil produces a thick, heavy, lubricating oil, used in vast quantities in the Lancashire factories for oiling the machinery, and also by watch and clock and philosophical instrument makers. This oil, when it comes from the still, is largely impregnated with solid paraffine, and when it cools it assumes the consistency of grease, the paraffine having coagulated into crystals. Before the lubricating oil can be made available for what it is intended, these crystals must be separated from it; and here again another operation, but one of a very simple nature, is requisite. The oil is poured into thick canvas bags, which are placed in hydraulic presses. Pressure is then applied with such force that the oil is squeezed out of the bags, leaving the crystals within. The oil thus squeezed out is the lubricating oil, and is ready for the market; the crystals are the paraffine in embryo which has so often been admired in the shape of candles.

When turned out of the bags the paraffine is in its coarsest state, and is of a dirty yellow colour. This hue is the result of the quantity of oily matter which the substance, in spite of its frequent purgings, still retains. Its perfect and final purification is effected by the repetition of a single process, continued till the requisite clearness is obtained. The paraffine is dissolved in heated naphtha, and is kept in solu-

tion for a considerable time, after which it is allowed to cool and again assume its crystalline form. The process of squeezing in the press is repeated, and when shaken out of the bags this time the paraffine is seen to have changed from yellow to dirty white, and is consequently so much purer. The operations of dissolving and straining are repeated till perfect pureness and whiteness are obtained. This result achieved, the odour of naphtha which clings to the substance is driven off by steam, and the paraffine, in a liquid state, is run into moulds, which form it into thick round cakes. In this shape it is sent off to the candle-makers.

AN ACORN.

WITHIN this little shell doth lie
A wonder of the earth and sky ;
Grasped in the hollow of my hand,
But more than I can understand.
A germ, a life, a million lives,
If this small life but lives and thrives,
And draws from earth, and air, and sun,
The endings in this husk begun.
A few years hence, a noble tree,
If time and circumstance agree :
'Twill shelter in the noonday shade
The browsing cattle of the glade.
'Twill harbour in its arching boughs
The ringdove and its tender spouse,
The bright-eyed squirrel, acorn fed,
The dormouse in its wintry bed.
Its stalwart arms and giant girth,
Felled by the woodman's stroke to earth,
May build for kings their regal thrones,
Or coffins to enclose their bones.
And looking further down the groove,
Where Time's great wheels for ever move,
We may behold, all sprung from this,
A woodland in the wilderness.
A forest filled with stately trees,
To rustle in the summer breeze,
Or moan with melancholy song,
When wintry winds blow loud and strong.
And ;—would the hope might be fulfilled !
A forest large enough to build,
When war's last shattered flag is furled,
The peaceful navies of the world.
Such possibilities there lie,
In this young nursing of the sky !
We know ; but cannot understand ;
Acorns ourselves in God's right hand !

NEW UNCOMMERCIAL SAMPLES.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

A SMALL STAR IN THE EAST.

I HAD been looking, yester-night, through the famous Dance of Death, and to-day the grim old wood-cuts arose in my mind with the new significance of a ghastly monotony not to be found in the original. The weird skeleton rattled along the streets before me, and struck fiercely, but it was never at the pains of assuming a disguise. It played on no dulcimer here, was crowned with no flowers, waved no plume, minced in no flowing robe or train, lifted no wine-cup, sat at no feast, cast no dice, counted

no gold. It was simply a bare, gaunt, famished skeleton, slaying its way along.

The borders of Ratcliffe and Stepney, Eastward of London, and giving on the impure river, were the scene of this uncompromising Dance of Death, upon a drizzling November day. A squalid maze of streets, courts, and alleys of miserable houses let out in single rooms. A wilderness of dirt, rags, and hunger. A mud-desert chiefly inhabited by a tribe from whom employment has departed, or to whom it comes but fitfully and rarely. They are not skilled mechanics in any wise. They are but labourers. Dock labourers, water-side labourers, coal porters, ballast heavers, such like hewers of wood and drawers of water. But they have come into existence, and they propagate their wretched race.

One grisly joke alone, methought, the skeleton seemed to play off here. It had stuck Election Bills on the walls, which the wind and rain had deteriorated into suitable rags. It had even summed up the state of the poll, in chalk, on the shutters of one ruined house. It adjured the free and independent starvers to vote for Thisman and vote for Thatman ; not to plump, as they valued the state of parties and the national prosperity (both of great importance to them, I think !), but, by returning Thisman and Thatman, each nought without the other, to compound a glorious and immortal whole. Surely the skeleton is nowhere more cruelly ironical in the original monkish idea !

Pondering in my mind the far-seeing schemes of Thisman and Thatman, and of the public blessing called Party, for staying the degeneracy, physical and moral, of many thousands (who shall say how many ?) of the English race ; for devising employment useful to the community, for those who want but to work and live ; for equalising rates, cultivating waste lands, facilitating emigration, and above all things, saving and utilising the oncoming generations, and thereby changing ever-growing national weakness into strength ; pondering in my mind, I say, these hopeful exertions, I turned down a narrow street to look into a house or two.

It was a dark street with a dead wall on one side. Nearly all the outer doors of the houses stood open. I took the first entry and knocked at a parlour door. Might I come in ? I might, if I pleased, Sur.

The woman of the room (Irish) had picked up some long strips of wood, about some wharf or barge, and they had just now been thrust into the otherwise empty

grate, to make two iron pots boil. There was some fish in one, and there were some potatoes in the other. The flare of the burning wood enabled me to see a table and a broken chair or so, and some old cheap crockery ornaments about the chimneypiece. It was not until I had spoken with the woman a few minutes that I saw a horrible brown heap on the floor in a corner, which, but for previous experience in this dismal wise, I might not have suspected to be "the bed." There was something thrown upon it, and I asked what that was?

" 'Tis the poor craythur that stays here, Sur, and 'tis very bad she is, and 'tis very bad she's been this long time, and 'tis better she'll never be, and 'tis slape she doos all day, and 'tis wake she doos all night, and 'tis the lead, Sur."

"The what?"

"The lead, Sur. Sure 'tis the lead-mills, where the women gets took on at eighteen-pence a day, Sur, when they makes application early enough and is lucky and wanted, and 'tis lead-poisoned she is, Sur, and some of them gits lead-poisoned soon and some of them gets lead-poisoned later, and some but not many niver, and 'tis all according to the constitooshun, Sur, and some constitooshuns is strong and some is weak, and her constitooshun is lead-poisoned bad as can be, Sur, and her brain is coming out at her ear, and it hurts her dreadful, and that's what it is and niver no more and niver no less, Sur."

The sick young woman moaning here, the speaker bent over her, took a bandage from her head, and threw open a back door to let in the daylight upon it, from the smallest and most miserable backyard I ever saw.

"That's what cooms from her, Sur, being lead-poisoned, and it cooms from her night and day the poor sick craythur, and the pain of it is dreadful, and God he knows that my husband has walked the streehts these four days being a labourer and is walking them now and is ready to work and no work for him and no fire and no food but the bit in the pot, and no more than ten shillings in a fortnight, God be good to us, and it is poor we are and dark it is and could it is indeed!"

Knowing that I could compensate myself thereafter for my self-denial, if I saw fit, I had resolved that I would give nothing in the course of these visits. I did this to try the people. I may state at once that my closest observation could not detect any

indication whatever of an expectation that I would give money; they were grateful to be talked to, about their miserable affairs, and sympathy was plainly a comfort to them; but they neither asked for money in any case, nor showed the least trace of surprise or disappointment or resentment at my giving none.

The woman's married daughter had by this time come down from her room on the floor above, to join in the conversation. She herself had been to the lead-mills very early that morning to be "took on," but had not succeeded. She had four children, and her husband, also a water-side labourer and then out seeking work, seemed in no better case as to finding it, than her father. She was English, and by nature of a buxom figure and cheerful. Both in her poor dress, and in her mother's, there was an effort to keep up some appearance of neatness. She knew all about the sufferings of the unfortunate invalid, and all about the lead-poisoning, and how the symptoms came on, and how they grew: having often seen them. The very smell when you stood inside the door of the works was enough to knock you down, she said, yet she was going back again to get "taken on." What could she do? Better be ulcerated and paralysed for eighteenpence a day, while it lasted, than see the children starve.

A dark and squalid cupboard in this room, touching the back door and all manner of offence, had been for some time the sleeping-place of the sick young woman. But the nights being now wintry, and the blankets and coverlets "gone to the leaving shop," she lay all night where she lay all day, and was lying then. The woman of the room, her husband, this most miserable patient, and two others, lay on the one brown heap together for warmth.

"God bless you, sir, and thank you!" were the parting words from these people—gratefully spoken too—with which I left this place.

Some streets away, I tapped at another parlour door on another ground floor. Looking in, I found a man, his wife, and four children, sitting at a washing stool by way of table, at their dinner of bread and infused tea-leaves. There was a very scanty cinderous fire in the grate by which they sat, and there was a tent bedstead in the room with a bed upon it and a coverlet. The man did not rise when I went in, nor during my stay, but civilly inclined his head on my pulling off my hat,

and, in answer to my inquiry whether I might ask him a question or two, said, "Certainly." There being a window at each end of this room, back and front, it might have been ventilated; but it was shut up tight, to keep the cold out, and was very sickening.

The wife, an intelligent quick woman, rose and stood at her husband's elbow, and he glanced up at her as if for help. It soon appeared that he was rather deaf. He was a slow simple fellow of about thirty.

"What was he by trade?"

"Gentleman asks what are you by trade, John?"

"I am a boiler-maker;" looking about him with an exceedingly perplexed air, as if for a boiler that had unaccountably vanished.

"He ain't a mechanic you understand, sir," the wife put in, "he's only a labourer."

"Are you in work?"

He looked up at his wife again. "Gentleman says are you in work, John?"

"In work!" cried this forlorn boiler-maker, staring aghast at his wife, and then working his vision's way very slowly round to me; "Lord, no!"

"Ah! He ain't indeed!" said the poor woman, shaking her head, as she looked at the four children in succession, and then at him.

"Work!" said the boiler-maker, still seeking that evaporated boiler, first in my countenance, then in the air, and then in the features of his second son at his knee: "I wish I *was* in work! I haven't had more than a day's work to do, this three weeks."

"How have you lived?"

A faint gleam of admiration lighted up the face of the would-be boiler-maker, as he stretched out the short sleeve of his threadbare canvas jacket, and replied, pointing her out: "on the work of the wife."

I forgot where boiler-making had gone to, or where he supposed it had gone to; but he added some resigned information on that head, coupled with an expression of his belief that it was never coming back.

The cheery helpfulness of the wife was very remarkable. She did slop-work; made pea-jackets. She produced the pea-jacket then in hand, and spread it out upon the bed: the only piece of furniture in the room on which to spread it. She showed how much of it she made, and how much was afterwards finished off by the machine. According to her calculation at the moment, deducting what her trimming cost

her, she got for making a pea-jacket ten-pence halfpenny, and she could make one in something less than two days. But, you see, it come to her through two hands, and of course it didn't come through the second hand for nothing. Why did it come through the second hand at all? Why, this way. The second hand took the risk of the given-out work, you see. If she had money enough to pay the security deposit—call it two pound—she could get the work from the first hand, and so the second would not have to be deducted for. But having no money at all, the second hand come in and took its profit, and so the whole worked down to ten-pence halfpenny. Having explained all this with great intelligence, even with some little pride, and without a whine or murmur, she folded her work again, sat down by her husband's side at the washing stool, and resumed her dinner of dry bread. Mean as the meal was, on the bare board, with its old gallipots for cups, and what not other sordid makeshifts; shabby as the woman was in dress, and toning down towards the Bosesman colour, with want of nutriment and washing; there was positively a dignity in her, as the family anchor just holding the poor shipwrecked boiler-maker's bark. When I left the room, the boiler-maker's eyes were slowly turned towards her, as if his last hope of ever again seeing that vanished boiler lay in her direction.

These people had never applied for parish relief but once; and that was when the husband met with a disabling accident at his work.

Not many doors from here, I went into a room on the first floor. The woman apologised for its being in "an untidy mess." The day was Saturday, and she was boiling the children's clothes in a saucepan on the hearth. There was nothing else into which she could have put them. There was no crockery, or tinware, or tub, or bucket. There was an old gallipot or two, and there was a broken bottle or so, and there were some broken boxes for seats. The last small scraping of coals left, was raked together in a corner of the floor. There were some rags in an open cupboard, also on the floor. In a corner of the room was a crazy old French bedstead, with a man lying on his back upon it in a ragged pilot jacket, and rough oilskin fantail hat. The room was perfectly black. It was difficult to believe, at first, that it was not purposely coloured black: the walls were so begrimed.

As I stood opposite the woman boiling the children's clothes—she had not even a piece of soap to wash them with—and apologising for her occupation, I could take in all these things without appearing to notice them, and could even correct my inventory. I had missed, at the first glance, some half a pound of bread in the otherwise empty safe, an old red ragged crinoline hanging on the handle of the door by which I had entered, and certain fragments of rusty iron scattered on the floor, which looked like broken tools and a piece of stove-pipe. A child stood looking on. On the box nearest to the fire sat two younger children; one, a delicate and pretty little creature whom the other sometimes kissed.

This woman, like the last, was woefully shabby, and was degenerating to the Bosjesman complexion. But her figure, and the ghost of a certain vivacity about her, and the spectre of a dimple in her cheek, carried my memory strangely back to the old days of the Adelphi Theatre, London, when Mrs. Fitzwilliam was the friend of Victorine.

"May I ask you what your husband is?"

"He's a coal-porter, sir." With a glance and a sigh towards the bed.

"Is he out of work?"

"Oh yes, sir, and work's at all times very scanty with him, and now he's laid up."

"It's my legs," said the man upon the bed, "I'll unroll 'em." And immediately began,

"Have you any older children?"

"I have a daughter that does the needle-work, and I have a son that does what he can. She's at her work now, and he's trying for work."

"Do they live here?"

"They sleep here. They can't afford to pay more rent, and so they come here at night. The rent is very hard upon us. It's rose upon us too, now—sixpence a week—on account of these new changes in the law, about the rates. We are a week behind; the landlord's been shaking and rattling at that door, frightful; he says he'll turn us out. I don't know what's to come of it."

The man upon the bed ruefully interposed: "Here's my legs. The skin's broke, besides the swelling. I have had a many kicks, working, one way and another."

He looked at his legs (which were much discoloured and misshapen) for a

while, and then appearing to remember that they were not popular with his family, rolled them up again, as if they were something in the nature of maps or plans that were not wanted to be referred to, lay hopelessly down on his back once more with his fantail hat over his face, and stirred not.

"Do your eldest son and daughter sleep in that cupboard?"

"Yes," replied the woman.

"With the children?"

"Yes. We have to get together for warmth. We have little to cover us."

"Have you nothing by you to eat but the piece of bread I see there?"

"Nothing. And we had the rest of the loaf for our breakfast, with water. I don't know what's to come of it."

"Have you no prospect of improvement?"

"If my eldest son earns anything to-day, he'll bring it home. Then we shall have something to eat to-night, and may be able to do something towards the rent. If not, I don't know what's to come of it."

"This is a sad state of things."

"Yes, sir, it's a hard, hard life. Take care of the stairs as you go sir—they're broken—and good day, sir!"

These people had a mortal dread of entering the workhouse, and received no out-of-door relief.

In another room in still another tenement, I found a very decent woman with five children—the last, a baby, and she herself a patient of the parish doctor—to whom, her husband being in the Hospital, the Union allowed for the support of herself and family, four shillings a week and five loaves. I suppose when Thisman, M.P., and Thatman, M.P., and the public blessing Party, lay their heads together in course of time, and come to an Equalisation of Rating, she may go down the Dance of Death to the tune of sixpence more.

I could enter no other houses for that one while, for I could not bear the contemplation of the children. Such heart as I had summoned to sustain me against the miseries of the adults, failed me when I looked at the children. I saw how young they were, how hungry, how serious and still. I thought of them, sick and dying in those lairs. I could think of them dead, without anguish; but to think of them, so suffering and so dying, quite unmanned me.

Down by the river's bank in Ratcliffe, I was turning upward by a side street, therefore, to regain the railway, when my

eyes rested on the inscription across the road, "East London Children's Hospital." I could scarcely have seen an inscription better suited to my frame of mind, and I went across and went straight in.

I found the Children's Hospital established in an old sail-loft or storehouse, of the roughest nature, and on the simplest means. There were trap-doors in the floors where goods had been hoisted up and down; heavy feet and heavy weights had started every knot in the well-trodden planking; inconvenient bulks and beams and awkward staircases perplexed my passage through the wards. But I found it airy, sweet, and clean. In its seven-and-thirty beds I saw but little beauty, for starvation in the second or third generation takes a pinched look; but I saw the sufferings both of infancy and childhood tenderly assuaged, I heard the little patients answering to pet playful names, the light touch of a delicate lady laid bare the wasted sticks of arms for me to pity; and the claw-like little hands, as she did so, twined themselves lovingly around her wedding-ring.

One baby mite there was, as pretty as any of Raphael's angels. The tiny head was bandaged, for water on the brain, and it was suffering with acute bronchitis too, and made from time to time a plaintive, though not impatient or complaining little sound. The smooth curve of the cheeks and of the chin was faultless in its condensation of infantine beauty, and the large bright eyes were most lovely. It happened, as I stopped at the foot of the bed, that these eyes rested upon mine, with that wistful expression of wondering thoughtfulness which we all know sometimes in very little children. They remained fixed on mine, and never turned from me while I stood there. When the utterance of that plaintive sound shook the little form, the gaze still remained unchanged. I felt as though the child implored me to tell the story of the little hospital in which it was sheltered, to any gentle heart I could address. Laying my world-worn hand upon the little unmarked clasped hand at the chin, I gave it a silent promise that I would do so.

A gentleman and lady, a young husband and wife, have bought and fitted up this building for its present noble use, and have quietly settled themselves in it as its medical officers and directors. Both have had considerable practical experience of medicine and surgery; he, as house-surgeon

of a great London Hospital; she, as a very earnest student, tested by severe examination, and also as a nurse of the sick poor, during the prevalence of cholera. With every qualification to lure them away, with youth and accomplishments and tastes and habits that can have no response in any breast near them; close begirt by every repulsive circumstance inseparable from such a neighbourhood, there they dwell. They live in the Hospital itself, and their rooms are on its first floor. Sitting at their dinner table they could hear the cry of one of the children in pain. The lady's piano, drawing materials, books, and other such evidences of refinement, are as much a part of the rough place as the iron bedsteads of the little patients. They are put to shifts for room, like passengers on board ship. The dispenser of medicines (attracted to them, not by self-interest, but by their own magnetism and that of their cause) sleeps in a recess in the dining-room, and has his washing apparatus in the side-board.

Their contented manner of making the best of the things around them, I found so pleasantly inseparable from their usefulness! Their pride in this partition that we put up ourselves, or in that partition that we took down, or in that other partition that we moved, or in the stove that was given us for the waiting-room, or in our nightly conversion of the little consulting-room into a smoking-room. Their admiration of the situation, if we could only get rid of its one objectionable incident, the coal-yard at the back! "Our hospital carriage, presented by a friend, and very useful." That was my presentation to a perambulator, for which a coach-house had been discovered in a corner down-stairs, just large enough to hold it. Coloured prints in all stages of preparation for being added to those already decorating the wards, were plentiful; a charming wooden phenomenon of a bird, with an impossible top-knot, who ducked his head when you set a counter weight going, had been inaugurated as a public statue that very morning; and trotting about among the beds, on familiar terms with all the patients, was a comical mongrel dog, called Poodles. This comical dog (quite a tonic in himself) was found characteristically starving at the door of the Institution, and was taken in and fed, and has lived here ever since. An admirer of his mental endowments has presented him with a collar bearing the legend, "Judge not Poodles by external appear-

ances." He was merrily wagging his tail on a boy's pillow when he made this modest appeal to me.

When this Hospital was first opened in January of the present year, the people could not possibly conceive but that somebody paid for the services rendered there; and were disposed to claim them as a right, and to find fault if out of temper. They soon came to understand the case better, and have much increased in gratitude. The mothers of the patients avail themselves very freely of the visiting rules; the fathers, often on Sundays. There is an unreasonable (but still, I think, touching and intelligible), tendency in the parents to take a child away to its wretched home, if on the point of death. One boy who had been thus carried off on a rainy night, when in a violent state of inflammation, and who had been afterwards brought back, had been recovered with exceeding difficulty; but he was a jolly boy, with a specially strong interest in his dinner, when I saw him.

Insufficient food and unwholesome living are the main causes of disease among these small patients. So, nourishment, cleanliness, and ventilation, are the main remedies. Discharged patients are looked after, and invited to come and dine now and then; so are certain famishing creatures who never were patients. Both the lady and the gentleman are well acquainted, not only with the histories of the patients and their families, but with the characters and circumstances of great numbers of their neighbours: of these they keep a register. It is their common experience that people sinking down by inches into deeper and deeper poverty, will conceal it, even from them, if possible, unto the very last extremity.

The nurses of this Hospital are all young; ranging, say, from nineteen to four-and-twenty. They have, even within these narrow limits, what many well-endowed Hospitals would not give them: a comfortable room of their own in which to take their meals. It is a beautiful truth that interest in the children and sympathy with their sorrows, bind these young women to their places far more strongly than any other consideration could. The best skilled of the nurses came originally from a kindred neighbourhood, almost as poor, and she knew how much the work was needed. She is a fair dressmaker. The Hospital cannot pay her as many pounds in the year as there are months in it, and one day the

lady regarded it as a duty to speak to her about her improving her prospects and following her trade. No, she said; she could never be so useful, or so happy, elsewhere, any more; she must stay among the children. And she stays. One of the nurses, as I passed her, was washing a baby-boy. Liking her pleasant face, I stopped to speak to her charge: a common, bullet-headed, frowning charge enough, laying hold of his own nose with a slippery grasp, and staring very solemnly out of a blanket. The melting of the pleasant face into delighted smiles as this young gentleman gave an unexpected kick and laughed at me, was almost worth my previous pain.

An affecting play was acted in Paris years ago, called *The Children's Doctor*. As I parted from my *Children's Doctor* now in question, I saw in his easy black necktie, in his loose buttoned black frock coat, in his pensive face, in the flow of his dark hair, in his eyelashes, in the very turn of his moustache, the exact realisation of the Paris artist's ideal as it was presented on the stage. But no romancer that I know of, has had the boldness to prefigure the life and home of this young husband and young wife, in the *Children's Hospital* in the East of London.

I came away from Ratcliffe by the Stepney railway station to the Terminus at Fenchurch-street. Any one who will reverse that route, may retrace my steps.

THE MADRAS BOY.

The Madras boy is not a boy. The word is a corruption of the Telugu word "boyi," a palanquin bearer. There is nothing which sounds stranger to a new-comer in Madras than the constant cries of Boy! He makes a call, and immediately on his entering the room the lady of the house cries, Boy! This startles him. But he is reassured by hearing "Yes, mam," answered, and seeing a native (probably of advanced years) appear and receive orders to have the punkah pulled. The master of the house comes in, greets his visitor, says he must stop to tiffin, and immediately roars, Boy! Again the domestic appears, and is ordered to have the horse taken out of the gharie; and so on at short intervals the silvery call or the trumpet roar of, Boy! resounds through the house. Ladies are generally some time before they can bring themselves to be constantly calling Boy! but in a bachelor's house the cry seems to be ever in the air. "Boy, cheroot!" "Boy, fire!" "Boy, soda!" And ever and anon, when the Boy is dozing, or far off, one hears the cry "crescendo," until it is evident that the caller must be red in the face

with anger and exertion. For, nothing ruffles a Madrasee more, than to shout Boy in vain.

Ramasami may be taken as the generic name of the Madras Boy; just as Jeames is that of the London footman. There are Pronasamis, Chimasamis, Appasamis, Autonis, Lazaruses, Gabriels, and a host of other names, but these are seldom used or even known by masters and mistresses. It is as a bachelor's factotum that Ramasami is seen to the best advantage. If his master's salary be small, Ramasami will manage his house, wait at table, black his boots, take care of his clothes, sew on his buttons—in short do the work of half a dozen servants—and will smoke only a few of master's cheroots, and will cheat him only a little. As his master's salary increases Ramasami takes care that more servants shall be engaged, and that the expenses shall increase; he smokes more of his master's cheroots, and cheats him a little more. But he is generally so willing, so handy, and after all cheats so discreetly, that a Madras Boy is generally acknowledged to be the best bachelor's servant in India. In a family where his accounts are carefully examined by the mistress daily, where there are plenty of servants under him, when he is not kept up to the mark as regards fire and cool soda, when he is not liable to be called on unexpectedly in the dead of night to prepare hot grilled bones and cool beer, then he generally degenerates into a fat, lazy, commonplace butler.

In many ways all Boys are strangely alike, as if they were all members of one family, or had all been brought up together. This is particularly noticeable in their English, which is of the "pigeon" kind, but much better than that of the Chinese. The use of the present participle and the word only is a marked peculiarity. "What master saying that only I doing" conveys to you Ramasami's intention of acting according to your order. The word "done" is also invariably used as an auxiliary to express the completion of an act. "Boy, have you done that?"—"Done do, sir." The simple perfect, when used by Ramasami, can never be trusted as having its proper grammatical force. Ask the Boy whether the brandy is gone, and if he says "Yes, sir, gone," should you find ten minutes afterwards that it is not gone, you must not look upon this as a great departure from truth. But if you ask him, "Has the brandy done go?" and he says "Yes, sir, done go," then, if it have not really gone, you are justified in calling him what David in his haste called all men. Some Boys have adopted, as pets of their own, particular English words; one of the first Boys the writer had in the country, had so adopted the word "about." He had originally been a cook-boy in a regiment, and having learnt slang and the use of his fists, he constantly aired both accomplishments when he had differences of opinion with the other servants or bazaar-men. One day he was brought to his master, guarded by two police peons with guns, and a third with a drawn sword, who declared that the Boy had nearly killed a

man. The Boy was asked what he had to say for himself? His reply was to the effect that he had quarrelled with the man, but had only slanged him, and that somebody else had done the beating: which he expressed thus: "I only jaw about; 'nother man lick about." But the schoolmaster is abroad in India, as elsewhere, and it seems likely that before long the Boy will speak English as correctly as the ordinary run of servants at home. It cannot be long before bells will be introduced into the houses of Europeans in India, and they will sound the death-knell of the cry, "Boy!"

FATAL ZERO.

A DIARY KEPT AT HOMBURG : A SHORT SERIAL STORY.

CHAPTER V.

MONDAY.—I am not sorry I adopted that resolution of forswearing the Kursaal, its reading-rooms, &c., though I did see Mr. Lewis, the clergyman of the English chapel, going in and sitting down, and reading his Galignani. Can he know what he is doing? He is on the spot, a resident, and it is, as it were, in his parish; at all events it is his concern. I even saw him enter from the colonnade, go up the steps into the great tavern entrance and pass through. He was looking for some one. Still, if I were to refine on the matter, this garden where I am now, is theirs, kept by their gardeners. This very seat on which I sit, was paid for by them. What do you say, Dora? Send me some little bit of casuistry to help me over the matter

What scenes I do see, even so far off as I am now; hints, as it were, of a whole history. Thus have I come in late to a theatre, and, standing in the box lobby, have peeped in through the little glass window in the door. That glimpse has a strange mystery, from the fact of all having been worked up to a point. The situation seems changed, while we who look are in quite another region—a long way behind, as it were. I have noticed a fair-haired youth with a gold "pinch-nose," and who is certainly not more than twenty, and on his arm is a charming little French girl of seventeen, round and rosy, and dressed in the most piquant way imaginable. I soon found out that they are just married, not further back than a month. They were supremely happy, like children running from one thing to another, and enjoying everything with a charming happiness and animation. He wore a straw-coloured silk coat and white hat. She, a most coquettish little hat and a pink and white short dress. On the first day I had

noticed them standing at the mouth of what I call the "yawning cave," hesitating gently, she looking in with the strangest air of curiosity, half in amazement, half in awe. Then I see them go in, and somehow that seems, by a sort of instinct, to be for me the beginning of something that would end tragically. The look of supreme happiness seemed, I suppose, to imply a contrast and supplement of disaster. In half an hour I saw them come back, she triumphant, fluttering—he with a complacent and boyish smile, looking at something bright in his hand. She skipped and danced and clapped her hands. I supposed they had won. They were children, and I had a surprising interest in them—I know not why . . . I dined to-day at the Four Seasons Hotel, which at these places, is always said to be a most gay and festive looking hotel, with orange trees in front, and a kind of scene-painting air. So an old gentleman, who had been all round the watering places, told me. He could not account for it, he said, but "there it was." I accounted for it to him by the invincible power of names. Give a girl, I said, a pretty and romantic name, like Geraldine, or Dorcas, or Violet, and she will be sure in some degree to fall into the *key* of that pretty music. He did not seem to see it, but grunted and moved away from me. Another man said, "he supposed it paid," which did not touch the matter. Their table d'hôtes are certainly the most festive way of eating a dinner. There is such variety in the faces, such pretty, intellectual, stupid, heavy faces—faces, indeed, that seem to have been turned all day long towards that dinner, and wistfully expecting it. A long narrow room, yet so bright and airy, and looking on the street; I can fancy nothing so cheerful. Every one is in good humour; and even the waiters have a festive air, principally, I believe, from their being boys and boyish, as is the custom here, and not the mouldy, ancient, clumsy-legged, clumsy-fingered veterans who do duty with us. And what a good dinner—what a choice of wine, instead of our limited sherry, and claret, and "Bass." The little flasks dot the table down. The affenthaler ordinary, but good; the yellow hocks, infinite in variety; the better Assmanhauser, and the hockheimer sparkling, all at such moderate prices. I see complete families pour in, and take up position in line, father, stout mother, pleasant daughters, and the conceited son. Then the dinner sets in like a torrent; all those pleasant German dishes. Those vegetables which we

know not of in England, and best of all, those delicious fowls, wherewith arrives the late but welcome salad. It does seem to me that it arrives at the precise and fitting moment, with a pleasant sense of expectancy going before it, he and his friend, the fowl. My dear Dora will hardly think that this can be her old invalid that is speaking.

On this day I find myself seated next to the little husband and wife of the morning, who come in full of delight and satisfaction and smiling, they know not why. I confess I am glad to be near so much innocence, and also on account of a little scheme I have in view. With such a pair, it is not difficult to begin a conversation. They were glad of the sympathy. My dear Dora knows that my stock of French is tolerably respectable, and that I can put it to fair use. They spoke together, and told me everything about themselves. They were not rich, but had enough. They were enjoying themselves so. It was the most delicious place in the world. "It was Heaven itself," she said; "and do you know," she added, "all the money we made—that is, he made—to-day, and so easily—eight napoleons; and out of it he bought me this sweet little brooch." And she showed on her breast what was certainly a very charming little ornament. This naïveté and her agreeable prattle began to interest me a great deal; but I could see there was in *him* a certain boyish self-sufficiency—a latent idea that this *gaming success was chiefly owing to his own cleverness*. He talked very wisely about the principles. I quietly ventured to hint that luck might change, as it did so often and so fatally. But he only laughed. Just as dinner was nearly over, a friend sent in to him; he went out, and I was left with the charming little wife. Something inspired me to seize the opportunity and give a little warning to this interesting young creature.

"Your husband," I said, "seems quite excited about his success; but may I give you a piece of advice? This beginning ends always in the same way. You know not how fatal is this spell, once it gets any influence. This rage for play, if it takes possession of any one, destroys all else—love, happiness, everything else. I know it, and every one here knows it." This way of putting it was a little artful, and I saw it had great effect. The pretty face looked a little scared. I went on. "I speak sincerely and in your interest, though I am a mere stranger; and I do advise you and

warn you to take care and not encourage your husband in this pursuit. There is no harm done as yet, and be content with your little spoils." This may seem a little too indulgent, too complacent, to the evil practice, against which I have sworn war to the knife, to the death, and from which, with the blessing of Heaven, I shall rescue many. But such a foe it is pardonable to meet with craft like his own.

He had come back, but I saw she had grown thoughtful. It was something to do a little bit of good, even in this cheap way. I see them at night, hovering about the yawning entrance to the cave, she, with a little hesitation, whispering him earnestly, and looking in with trepidation. They do not see me. They walk away, but, alas, come back, and enter.

CHAPTER VI.

TUESDAY.—But I must leave these minor things quite out of sight, to come to the strangest thing that has happened, the most mysterious and inconceivable. Who could have dreamt of it? And yet I am not sorry. Dora, dear, prepared for something dramatic! Let me begin calmly. Last night, after the young pair had gone in, I was sitting under the long glass colonnade of the terrace, looking down on the crowd in those gardens, lit up by the twinkling lamps, and which have such a charm for me. Along that colonnade are about a hundred little tables, all crowded with eager and lively people, sipping drinks, taking iced beer, champagne, happy winners, and more dismal losers. The waiters are flying up and down, hurrying to and fro, shouting orders; while below, among the green trees and flowers, are the crowds seated, and on the right the illuminated kiosque, with the delicious Prussian band pouring out their strains. "Ravishing" is but a poor word for these accomplished musicians, who belong to the Thirty-fourth Regiment, and are led by the skilful "chapel-master," Parlow. Their vast strength and breath of sound, their rich instruments, with every instrument made the most of, their exquisite taste, volume, clearness, distinctness, and mastery of the most difficult passages, makes their performance almost entrancing. Hear them play three overtures—William Tell, Tannhauser, and Oberon—and the musician will be amazed as well as enraptured, the marvellous violin passages of the last being performed like so much child's play—just as an accomplished pianoforte player runs up and down the keys. Hear them, too, in some

fantasia on airs from L'Africaine or Faust, and revel in the taste and feeling of the solo, and the dramatic bursts and crashes, and the "hurrying" and lingering of the time, as though they were an opera orchestra. When we think of our creatures—those groups of hodmen and mechanics who form what is by courtesy termed "a military band," those mere grinders and sawyers of music, who play as though they would dig or hammer—when we think, I say, of our "crack" regiments, our Guards, formed out of the very pink of professionals, and see how mediocre is the result, one must feel a little humiliation and some envy, and should be glad to come this distance to hear those Prussians. I can hear them, too, with a safe conscience, for they do not belong to the administration.

But I am putting off this wonderful surprise. I am sitting there, listening, close, also, to the mouth of the cave, which has still for me that sense of mystery, when I hear some angry voices, and two men are coming down the steps in excitement. One is tall, and in a white Panama hat, and very excited. I hear him say, "It is always the way when I listen to your infernal talk. I'd have had a hundred in my hand now but for you. I'd like to pitch you down these steps, on your face! Go—leave me alone!"

The voice seemed familiar to me, so cold and grating, with all its excitement, that I seemed to recall it perfectly. Unconsciously I started up to be quite certain, and, on the noise, he turned and looked at me. He knew me; I knew him. His face turned livid, and a spasm of fury passed over it.

"Grainger!"

"Austen!"

He advanced towards me, and for a moment I thought he meant some violence. But he suddenly checked himself, and then walked away, down the terrace. Then, as suddenly turned back and came up to me.

After a pause, "So," he went on, "you are here. Did you know that I was here?"

"No, Grainger," I answered; "I did not."

"What, no new scheme on hand? No, I should say not; for you had better wait, my friend, until you know whether the old account has been closed."

"The only scheme I have," I answered, "is to get back some health, which is nearly gone from me."

"Ay. But do you know all that has gone from me—all that you took from me?"

Eh?—stole from me! What do you say?
Answer!"

Again there was something so threatening in his manner, that I half moved back, as if to defend myself.

"Oh, don't be afraid," he said; "we dare not do these things in this place. Here kellner, come here, will you! Bring some red wine here, strong and good, and don't be an hour, with your 'V'la, monsieur,' and all that humbug. Come, sit down, Mr. Austen; you may as well; I am not going to be violent, so you needn't be afraid. I want to let you know something which you ought to know."

"Grainger," I said, "when all that took place, you had your opportunity. I met you fairly and—"

"*Met me fairly!*" he repeated, his eyes dropping on me with a flash, "can you say that?" Then he laughed. "My good friend that is all so long ago. An old story like that must not be exhumed. Let it rot away in the ground. Dead leaves, my boy. If you don't rake 'em up, I promise you I shan't. There. Come! let us have something, as earnest. You shall pay for me, who was the loser, and I *think* the injured man."

Something in this phrase struck me, and I felt there was some truth in what he said. He was the defeated party; I was the victor, and ought to be generous. "What shall it be," I said, "champagne?" "Do you take me for an American?" he said, with a laugh. "No, sir; cognac. Now let us talk. I have forgiven and forgotten all that—though it ruined me. She had a sort of infatuation over me, that girl—I mean, Mrs. Austen. If she had come here I would have followed her. I'd have played my body and soul, that is if I had seen a chance. You had it all your own way. How does she look—does she hate me? Come! And yet a good deal is on her gentle head. This is my life now, poor me; a 'hell,' to many others. You saw what I was then, a gentleman, at least well off, respected—own that! Well, I had to leave the army; I did something I ought not to have done, from sheer desperation. Yes, I did, and sank lower and lower, and all this was your joint work; but I don't want to blame you. By Jove, it is I who am raking up the dead leaves after all! Ah! here's the cognac."

I felt a pity for him. There was truth in what he said. Since you, Dora, had been saved from him, all these troubles had come upon him. He had grown desperate;

he was at least privileged to speak as he pleased, and have that slight consolation, I saw, too, that he was altered. At that time he was considered by the women a good-looking man, his face having a little of that rude gauntness which is not unpleasing. He had large eyes, and a black irregular beard and moustache. Now he had grown careless in his dress. I knew how much that portended, and felt a deep pity for him.

"Grainger," I said, "it was hard for you, for I know you loved her. But I declare solemnly here, that my loving her had nothing to do with it, and you know yourself, Grainger, the marriage with you could not have been for her happiness after that business—"

His brow contracted. "I know what you mean," he said. "That was false, false in everything. False, as I sit here, and hope to be—well I have not much hope of that."

"They *said* it was true," I said; "but even to have such a rumour, and a fair innocent young girl, admit yourself, Grainger, it could not be."

He answered in a low voice, "It was all false, a lie, an invention. There was the sting. Of course, I could not prove it; but suppose it untrue, what punishment would you say was enough for those who did me so horrid an injury—would a whole life be too long to devote to punishing the doer of such an injury?"

"I suppose you mean me?" I said.

"I *did* mean you *then*," he said. "I suppose, if there had been opportunity, of course I could have killed you. But that is all over, all past and gone. Nothing could make Roly Poly as he was before. The egg-shell is broken, and the yolk run out. So tell me about yourself, and about her. What brings you here?"

There was something so frank, so generous, so valorous in this way of taking the thing, that with an involuntary motion I put out my hand and grasped his. Shall I say, too, I felt a sudden twinge of conscience; and had all along a dim foreboding that the story might not have been true, or at least, have got its colouring of truth, from what might have been interested motives on my side? I was too much concerned, perhaps, to be impartial, and if he *was* innocent, then some share in this work might be laid to my account. What was plainly my duty was to try and compensate in some way, at least by kindness—for I had not much else at my command—for so cruel a wrong as this. I com-

plied heartily with his wish ; told him all that brought me here, and the business I was about. He listened attentively. Then we wandered back, step by step, slowly and agreeably too, till we got to the old, old days, where we called up all those scenes, —Dora, the military balls, the pleasant nights, and pleasant days ; what seemed like pictures or scenes out of a beautiful play seen in childhood—misty, indistinct, but delightful to think over. He spoke charmingly, regretfully, and even tenderly.

"Those were happy and innocent days," he said. "Scarcely happy after all for me, though there is a sort of happiness in such suffering. Yet compared with all I have gone through since—! Still in this life," he added, nodding at the cave behind us, "there is an excitement, too—it helps one to forget."

"But think, how will it end?" I said, with some excitement. "It cannot have the slow progress of what you call a life. It must hurry on suddenly to destruction. Oh, Grainger, stop, I implore of you, before it be too late!"

"But if it be too late," he said, "and was too late years ago? But I don't know if I saw any road.—it is all a jungle, or my eyes have got dim. Still, since you have talked to me, and brought before me those days, I don't feel quite so bad. We will speak of those things again—her name to me may have some power, at least, and if you will not think it a trouble or a bore while you are here—"

I wrung his hand warmly. "I would take it as a favour," I said; "oh, let me help you in some way, and if I have injured you, let me at least try and keep you from this life, which must end in misery and ruin."

"Well, we shall see," he said.

Two people came out of the cave a little hurriedly. It was the youthful husband walking first, by himself, his hands in his pockets, his face flushed. She was tripping behind him, with the most dismal depicted expression on her face. In a moment that small hand, it had a tiny black mitten on, was on his arm. It seemed to receive an impatient welcome there, and dropped again.

Grainger followed my eyes, "Ah!" he said, "the old story!"

Hers met mine, and they seemed to say, "Oh, how right you were;" I knew I was—an instinct told me I should be so. After all, bred in a country town, as I was, my dear Dora, I have learnt to judge a little of human nature. It comes by a sort of

instinct. I wish I had been wrong in this mistake ; but the same instinct whispers to me that this is but the end of the first act. Poor little pair !

"That was the way it was with me at first," said Grainger ; "I know that story pretty well. I have seen it here over and over again. Will you come in with me and see me try my hand—a new face brings new luck. And yet to-night it seems to jar upon me—you have brought me back into the old days. But still what can I do. As well tell a man who has sold himself to brandy, not to drink. Besides, what would be the use? I may as well finish, as I have begun. I have nothing to look to now."

"I cannot tell you how this pains me, Grainger," I said, really distressed. "O, if my words could but have some little effect! Do—as you say the holy influence of the past is upon you—just for this night abstain. Even for Dora's sake, whom you once so loved, and who would rejoice to know that her name even had that little power left. If you knew its effect on me!"

A very curious look came into his face. He turned it off with a laugh. "Well, a night doesn't make much difference. I'm a fool, I know. There, we'll walk about instead."

I felt almost a thrill of pleasure at this unexpected success. My pet's name is, indeed, an amulet to conjure with. After so many years, and at so many hundred miles distance, to have such a power! And I think I may fairly claim a small share of the credit. Earnestness and sincerity go some way : perhaps, too, that little magnanimity. There was some little tact in my reception of him ; others might have grown confused or angry. Here am I praising myself ; but I am in such good spirits. Put up your gentle prayer for him, Dora.

Wednesday.—I found Grainger last night really entertaining and amusing. Hitherto a good many of the people here have been like the figures in front of the old grinding organs, revolving, and glittering, and eccentric to look at, but still without names or characters. Grainger knows them all, names, dates, and addresses. There was the great banker, there was the great speculator, the man who could change paper into gold by a touch, by a word even, and who was now wandering about here, as poor as I or my companion. Did I see that ascetical-looking-man? that was the Bishop of Gravesend; or that woman in orange and black, the famous Phryne

Coralie, English by birth, but who had risen to the highest rank in whatever "carrière" she followed. There was the great singer, who had shrieked and declaimed the tragedy queens of opera, who had denounced the craven Pollio many thousand nights in her life, who had bearded wicked Counts de Luna as many times more, who had sang in the garden turning over the stage jewels with grinning Mephistopheles and enraptured Faust; and here she was taking an ice. Here on the terrace is the smaller lady, who sits on a lower throne, but has far more subjects and adorers. Here is that Baker, known to every one who comes to these places, who dogs lords and ladies, and makes them stand while he pours in his little adulatory small shot; and here is quite a happy hunting ground for those ladies of good connexion and title even, whose wings have been a little burnt as they fluttered through town drawing-rooms, but who find them quite sufficient to support them here, the atmosphere is so dense.

He is infinitely amusing is Grainger, his stories and his scandal, which I can quite conceive to be perfectly true. I can see he has got into spirits as he tells these things; and though it is rather light and unprofitable food for the mind, it takes off his mind from things more dangerous. What we said last night has left a deep impression: and to think of one so clever, so observant, so brilliant even, to have been shipwrecked in this way, indirectly through our doing! I must ask my dear pet to write me out something kind and sympathetic, which I can show to this poor waif and comfort him. That little heart has done the mischief, and she must make up a little, and I lay a husband's despotic commands on her. For I have set my heart on bringing this man back into the path of decency and order, and feel a conviction I shall succeed, if I could get but some power and influence over him. I say again, my pet must pray.

Sunday.—How strange is a Sunday in this place! There is an English church, a chaplain, and a regular round of duty; but I think there would be less affectation in ignoring altogether such religious machinery. It is at variance with the place, quite an anachronism. For even in the relations of religion to the state—I mean

to the "administration" there used to enter something grotesque and curious. When the use of the Lutheran church was graciously conceded to English worshippers it was an article strictly insisted on, "that there should be no preaching against going to the Bank"—pleasant euphemism for gambling. This was a serious warning. Later on, as the church and chaplain had to be kept up by voluntary contributions and "a book," which was sent round to the visitors, the company found that this was telling a little indirectly on their interests. Testy fathers grew impatient at these applications: "infernal begging place," "have to pay my own man at home"—complaints which were, of course, nothing to the Bank. But when it was added, "I shall take care *not to come back* here again," it took another shape. Like the "refait" at their own game, it told, on the whole, against the player. So it was conveyed to the chaplain that in their zeal for the advancement of religion the administration would be happy to pay him his salary, and a handsome one too; the collecting by a book was scarcely dignified, &c. This tempting offer *had* to be declined, possibly with reluctance; but was a *little too strong*. The wages of preaching to be furnished by the wages of sin! By-and-by, too, it might have been required that a word or two should be delicately insinuated in favour of the harmlessness of the game.

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